



Ensuring children facing disadvantage get the support they need



Children living in disadvantaged circumstances benefit the most from quality early learning programs, giving them the best chance to achieve their potential. Early learning is an investment, not a cost, which allows Australians to work together to instigate change.

Evidence and Research

Analysis from the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) of children in their first year of school shows some children are at greater risk of being developmentally vulnerable:

- 22 per cent of all children are likely to start school developmentally vulnerable;
- Indigenous children were twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable (42 per cent vs 21 per cent);
- Children in remote areas were almost twice as likely to be vulnerable as those in major cities (35 per cent vs 21 per cent);

“Unfortunately, the children most likely to benefit from access to early learning are also those least likely to attend.”

- Children from the most disadvantaged communities' quintile were twice as likely to be vulnerable as those from the top quintile (32.6 per cent vs 15.5 per cent)
- Children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds not proficient in English were four times more likely as English speakers (94 per cent vs 20 per cent) to be developmentally vulnerable;

- Boys are almost twice as likely as girls to be developmentally vulnerable (28.5 per cent vs 15.5 per cent).

But, if children attend early learning, the AEDC found that the likelihood of starting school behind reduces by a third.

Starting early (at 2 and 3 years of age) has an even bigger impact. Research from around the world demonstrates that access to quality early learning can have a profound impact on the later learning and life outcomes of children facing disadvantage.¹ Unfortunately, the children most likely to benefit from access to early learning are also those least likely to attend.



Who is vulnerable?

At Goodstart we believe children who are vulnerable are those at risk of poorer learning, development and wellbeing outcomes and include children not yet participating in ECEC. Our definition aligns with COAG and includes children:

- from low SES backgrounds (ie, SEIFA 1 & 2)
- from culturally & linguistically diverse backgrounds – especially those newly arrived and/or from refugee or humanitarian programs
- from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent
- with a condition or disability
- children at risk of abuse or neglect

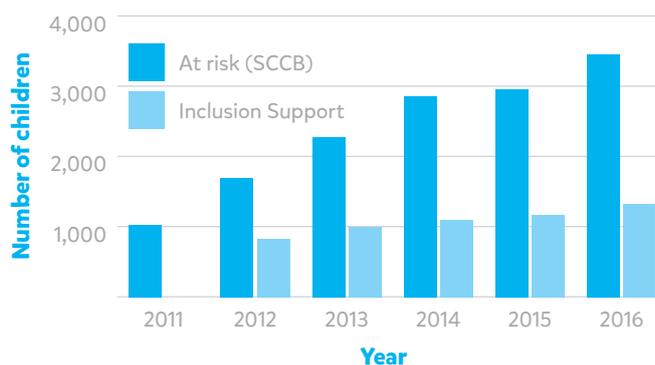
What's happening in Australia?

Governments in Australia have invested in multiple interventions to support children facing disadvantage including:

- Providing free access to ECEC for children at risk of abuse or if their families are facing temporary financial hardship;
- Providing additional inclusion support for children with additional needs to participate in early learning;
- Funding specific services for children in remote or Indigenous communities;
- Supporting Child and Family Centres and playgroups to work with both parents and children to influence parenting skills and the home learning environment;
- Exemptions from the activity test for low income families to access early learning under the new Child Care Subsidy beginning in July 2018.

More needs to be done to remove the multiple barriers to access to early learning for children facing disadvantage. We also need to ensure that when children are in early learning they get the learning, development and emotional support they need to meet their individual needs.

Children at risk or receiving inclusion support in Goodstart centres



Source: Goodstart Early Learning.

What is Goodstart doing?

Goodstart is committed to improving access to and participation in quality early learning for children facing disadvantage, through our universal ECEC services as well as targeted programs and integrated services, and by ensuring our educators continue to strengthen their skills and knowledge to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable children and their families.

Our Social Inclusion Strategy

Goodstart provides support for families across Australia to help them understand and embrace the importance of early learning. As this progresses, we're also working to unite early learning professionals and policy makers on a national pathway to positive change.

We fund additional support for more than 40 centres in disadvantaged areas to help educators and families enhance child outcomes, with plans to double the number of centres over time. We have welcomed 1,300 children with additional needs into our centres and supported more than 8,000 children and families to access financial support.

Our Social Inclusion Strategy has four pillars – Universal; Targeted; Advocacy and Affirmative Action; and New Service Models and we have six key areas of focus:

1. *Building strong family partnerships*
2. *Becoming community connected*
3. *Respecting and celebrating diversity*
4. *Improving health and wellbeing*
5. *Accessing specialist support*
6. *Improving organisational systems*

Early learning workforce

Goodstart funds professional development and a team of inclusion specialists to help our educators develop inclusive practices. More than 450 educators across 290 centres have completed the Family Connections program which is designed to improve the quality and effectiveness of partnerships and collaborations with children and families, especially those facing disadvantage. Goodstart's focus on each child's needs has also seen the number of children with additional needs receiving inclusion support and various forms of fee relief grow dramatically.

Reconciliation Action Plan

During 2015-16 Goodstart expanded its support for children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This included work on a second Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) which will define our

commitment and actions towards reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples over the next four years.

Goodstart is immensely proud of our partnerships with other community organisations committed to social inclusion:

- Every year our educators apply to spend several months on secondment at the Baya Gawiy Buga yani Jandu yani u Early Learning Centre at Fitzroy Crossing in Western Australia;
- With the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Whittlesea Council our Jindi Centre provides early learning within an integrated child, family and community hub;
- In partnership with Mission Australia we host a program to provide traineeships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in early childhood;
- We work with the Benevolent Society to provide the Early Years Fund;

- Working with the Minderoo Foundation we deliver additional training courses to support families in Western Australia;
- Centres in disadvantaged communities deliver affordable, nutritious meals for children and families in partnership with Foodbank and OzHarvest.
- Our partnerships with the Woodside Development Fund and United Way (funded by the NSW Department of Housing) support the delivery of a Family Connections Program in Western Australia centres.
- We also partner with organisations and service providers in local communities to deliver speech pathology, occupational therapy and child and family support services in 40 centres delivering integrated services in our enhanced service model.

References

1. Dept of Education & Training (2016) 'Australia's Early Development Census National Report 2015' Australian Government, Canberra

Our Vision

is for Australia's children to have the best possible start in life.

Our Purpose

is to ensure children have the learning, development and wellbeing outcomes they need for school and life.



To see how we bring our plan to life, you can view our animation here:
<https://vimeo.com/goodstartel/strategic>

goodstart
early
learning

Together there's no limit.